

The Address—Mr. McGrath

until the Government brings down its Budget in April which, of course, will be its pre-election budget that will contain all the goodies that are designed to attract the Canadian people and restore confidence in a Government that in fact has lost the confidence of the electorate.

I suppose one can hardly blame the Government in a way when we look at how the press is treading this question. It is difficult to understand how the press could ignore it every time it is raised in the House. That has been the pattern lately. For example, the last unemployment date released a few days before the House opened indicated that unemployment in Canada had actually risen during the recovery year of 1983 over the recession year of 1982. In 1982, the year ended with a rate of unemployment of 11 per cent. In 1983 the year closed out with an unemployment rate of 11.9 per cent. We had fallen behind in terms of unemployment in the country bearing in mind the growth in the labour force.

We saw something in those figures which should be very disturbing to the Government and the country. We saw unemployment locked in at 11.1 per cent over the past quarter, the past three months. There has been no change month over month for the past few months. We are told that that situation will continue into 1984.

We sometimes lose sight of the fact that behind these statistics there are human beings and human problems with potential human tragedies. We seem to forget the fact that there are 1.3 million people in this country today without work. Many of them are long-term unemployed. We forget the fact that there are still over 500,000 young people in this country who are unemployed. That is a situation which has not changed in the past 16 months. Youth unemployment in this country has averaged between 18 per cent and 20 per cent over the past 16 months and we are told by the OECD and economists that this will continue on into 1984 and 1985. That is totally unacceptable. Yet there are no new dollars going into youth programs for this current fiscal year and no new dollars for the next fiscal year. All we have is a recycling of existing programs.

A few days ago I put questions in the House to the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Roberts) regarding what is called a Special Employment Initiatives Fund. What is the Special Employment Initiatives Fund? That is good question. There is \$150 million in the Budget of June, 1982 for what is called the Special Employment Initiatives Fund. That reappeared in the Budget of April last year under a new name.

But it was the same fund, \$150 million. It has \$300 million so far but we cannot get any information about how that money was spent. We cannot get any information on the criteria regarding how that money is to be spent. We are told that it is not part of the four streams of employment programs of the Department of Employment and Immigration. We are told that it is global in nature and touches all Departments. We are told that we must wait until the Government sees fit to let us have the criteria.

In actual fact, this is a pre-election porkbarrel. We must recognize it for what it is. It is a Cabinet porkbarrel to which

only Cabinet members have access so they can announce grants for swimming pools and hockey arenas across the country in constituencies where they believe it might buy them some political points.

That \$300 million is equal to the amount the Government is spending on the only special program it has for young people, the Career Access Program. If that \$300 million was taken out of that porkbarrel, or the \$200 million which we see was budgeted for that special program next year and which we are told will continue is added to the Career Access Program, we just might do something for the young people rather than provide a mere 90,000 jobs for the 540,000 young people who are unemployed. Yet there was not a word about that from the Government. In the committee we asked for the criteria and were told that it would be coming. We asked for the criteria in the House and were told that it would be coming. We were told by the Minister that it is a fast-tracking program. In other words, you can get your hands on it very quickly if you are a Minister.

There are no criteria. There are no regulations. They answer to no one. It is a hidden porkbarrel and there is not one single line about that fact reported by the press of this country. Why? Because they are bored with the unemployment question. They cannot come up with any new headlines; they say that we are saying the same things over and over again. Certainly we are saying the same things over and over again. We have an obligation to say the same things over and over again as long as unemployment in this country remains the same. We have that clear, moral obligation to say the same thing over and over again. The press has a concomitant obligation to report what goes on in this House, and as long as the press continues to refuse to report the unemployment story and continues to be bored by it, the Government will complacently seem to have nothing to worry about. I say that is a sad commentary on what is going on in this place.

The Hon. Parliamentary Secretary just made a rather unbecoming intervention. I hope he will say the same thing when he gets the floor, if he does get the floor.

● (1140)

Mr. Fisher: Do you know what I said?

Mr. McGrath: I know what the hon. gentleman said. What he said is not parliamentary and I will not repeat it.

I could continue with the national unemployment statistics but I have an obligation to make some references to my own province. I did a little bit of checking this morning prior to coming into the House. The Province of Newfoundland, with a work force of 221,000 people, has an unemployment rate of almost 20 per cent; 19.5 per cent in actual fact. There are 43,000 people considered to be unemployed, seasonally adjusted with labour force participation factors built in.

That is bad enough, but if you look behind the figures the situation is even worse. I checked with the Unemployment Insurance Commission to see how many people in Newfoundland were drawing unemployment insurance. There are 94,000